DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 387 174 JC 950 476

AUTHOR Harris, Zelema M.
TITLE Leadership for Creating Community within Institutions.
PUB DATE 25 Apr 95
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Association of Community Colleges (75th, Minneapolis, MN, April 22-25, 1995).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Role; *Community Colleges; *Cultural Pluralism; Diversity (Institutional); Information Skills; Information Utilization; *Leadership Qualities; *Leadership Responsibility; *Organizational Climate; *Organizational Development; Participative Decision Making; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

Community college leaders are responsible for creating an institutional climate that is supportive, nurturing, collaborative, integrative, empowering, and inclusive. In providing leadership, it is important to remember that collective wisdom can take a college much farther than operating according to one person's ideal. In managing a multifaceted organization like a college, it is important to remember the community-building power of information. At Parkland College, in Illinois, information has often helped to create order. For example, a child development center was developed when staff learned of children being left around the college while their parents attended classes. Similarly, a Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning was developed to develop new faculty when the college realized that a large number of faculty were nearing retirement. Other examples include international education efforts stemming from faculty recognition of the global marketplace and the making of budget decisions based on recommendations from a planning committee composed of representatives from every employee group. Community can be created at a college, not through rules, but through information that shapes beliefs and assumptions. At Parkland, assumptions regarding creating community include the following: (1) institutional climate will only change with impetus from the top; (2) quality and community flourish in an environment of trust; (3) hierarchical models of management do not work; and (4) before people can feel a sense of ownership, they must feel included. (KP)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 387 174

LEADERSHIP FOR CREATING COMMUNITY WITHIN INSTITUTIONS

by Zelema M. Harris
President, Parkland College
Champaign, Illinois

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Z. Harris

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Presented at the American Association of Community Colleges
1995 Annual Convention

Minneapolis, Minnesota
April 25, 1995

JC 950 476

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

As community college leaders we are, in the broadest sense, responsible for creating an institutional climate that is supportive, nurturing, collaborative, integrative, empowering, and inclusive. Such a climate doesn't just happen by exhortations. Rather, it comes from a deep and profound understanding of self and the role of leadership. I believe each of us has to come to grips with our values before we can become effective leaders.

Hunter Lewis, the author of the book, A Question of Values, concludes that just because values are diverse and we may not always agree, "values are not the muddle they sometimes seem. There are, he continues, some basic choices, some uniform options that we are all faced with." Mr. Lewis asserts that "our challenge as Americans and as human beings is to identify these options and then choose among them..." Each of us must answer the question, "what manner of men (and women) shall we be?"

I like the way Stephen Covey, author of The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, puts it. He says to "begin with the end in mind." In his book, he asks people to imagine they are attending their own funeral service.

What would you like your loved ones to say about you?

What kind of character would you like them to have seen?

Covey says when you're able to identify those things that you want to accomplish, you've begun to master leadership.

During the Civil Rights Movement, the question that we had to answer was, "What are you willing to die for?"

Today, I ask myself, "What am I willing to be fired for?"

There are few absolutes in our lives. We need to know what those are. We cannot lead in a vacuum. We must have values that guide our decisions and give continuity in a world of chaos and discontinuity.

As leaders, we are responsible for helping to build a sense of connectedness within our institutions. If we are to be effective within our institutions, we must create: unity between disparate competing factions and departments, a sense of ownership for institutional outcomes, and a necessity for planned change, while respecting, and building on the past.

In providing leadership to create community at our institutions, it is important to remember that you can't run a college alone. In their 1993 book, Redesigning Collegiate Leadership: Teams and Teamwork in Higher Education, Bensimon and Newmann wrote that good management is a result of collective "mindwork." We shouldn't constrain ourselves by operating according tc one person's idea when collective wisdom can take us so much further.

One of the most significant mind shifts for me was reading Margaret Wheatley's 1992 book, Leadership and the New Science. I had never understood why we tried to manage our institutions by dividing them into "parts." After reading Wheatley, I learned about how our institutions, with all of our organizational charts, and people locked into "little boxes" of functions and roles, are based on Newtonian theory. This theory led to our belief that by studying the parts, you understand the whole.

But science has changed and so must our way of thinking. Separate parts do not make a whole. You must understand the interrelatedness of the parts to each other and to the whole.

Which leads me to the community-building power of information. Margaret Wheatley says that information is the "creative energy of the universe." Information should disturb the peace and get people riled up. And though it may not seem like it, information will create order.

Let me give you a few examples of how this has worked at Parkland.

- Our retention efforts grew out of knowledge that our attrition was embarrassing, especially in specific disciplines. Faculty within departments are now submitting proposals for sabbaticals, release time, and conferences to learn more about teaching and learning, which is the core of any retention effort.
- A Child Development Center grew out of information we shared with the staff that large numbers of children were being left by their parents in the alcoves around the college while they attended classes. I told faculty and staff about the liability and the fact that we were creating a population of adults who would hate college.
- A Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning was developed because of the large number of faculty nearing retirement and the need to develop new faculty. In addition, we recognized a need to avert faculty burnout and provide professional development opportunities.

- International education has grown as faculty began to recognize that we live and work in a global marketplace and that our students deserve exposure to a global curriculum.

- The growing number of students of color and women with special needs is being addressed through gender-balanced, multicultural curricular reform.

- Budget decisions are based on recommendations from an operational planning committee, composed of representatives from every employee group. Personnel know how much revenue is available and fully understand that the college cannot support everything that we have been supporting in the past. We're asking for their help in making these tough decisions.

- Information is generated through futures conferences, where faculty and staff have the opportunity to interpret the vision of the college based on available information. This activity forces them to seek additional information, analyze it, and propose solutions.

I believe that as long as there is clarity about what we are as an institution, we can create community -- not through a lot of rules, but through information that shapes our beliefs and assumptions.

Based on my own experience, I have developed several assumptions that will enable Parkland to continue its journey toward community.

The first assumption is that the institutional climate will not change unless there is an impetus for change, which must start with the president and the board.

A second assumption is that quality and community flourish in an environment of trust. A healthy climate must be created as we transform our institutions. People don't come to work everyday to do a bad job -- they want to be viewed as excellent, productive employees. Just accepting this basic assumption can go a long way in how we treat people as individuals.

A third assumption is that many people feel threatened by change. At the same time, resistance to change is natural and necessary. Consequently, we must find new ways to get people involved, through the formation of task forces, study groups, and self-regulating teams. As leaders, we need to seek individuals out and deal with their fears.

Fourth, hierarchical models of management do not work. They force people to work in boxes. Statements like, "I don't report to you, therefore I don't have to do what you say," express the debilitating effects of hierarchical systems on both workers and managers.

The fifth assumption is that before people can feel a sense of ownership, they must feel included. Parkland College supports a gender-balanced, multicultural curriculum. In November 1993, we hosted the first statewide multicultural conference for teachers

from K-12 through university. Nearly 500 people attended and heard the true superstars of gender-balanced, multicultural education, including Dr. James Banks, the Sadkers, and Patricia Hill Collins.

This past summer with a Ford Foundation grant, we trained faculty throughout the state on how to transform their curriculum to include women and people of color.

Providing information that is alive, vibrant and disturbing is what a leader must do. This is how we engage people and create community.

But you do not create a community overnight. Nor is there any kind of "finish line." Creating community is an ongoing process that must begin with the leadership of your organization.

In summary, the leadership needed to build community within an institution is a leadership that:

- includes
- motivates
- listens and inspires
- understands the role values play in leading
- shapes the vision from the institution's collective mindwork
- fosters growth
- and creates the opportunity for each person within the organization to lead.

References:

Bensimon, Estela M., and Newmann, Anna. *Redesigning Collegiate Leadership: Teams and Teamwork in Higher Education.* Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.

Covey, Stephen R. *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: Restoring the Character Ethic.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989.

Lewis, Hunter. *A Question of Values: Six Ways We Make the Personal Choices That Shape Our Lives.* San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990.

Wheatley, Margaret J. *Leadership and the New Science.* San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1992.